

WOW Graduates Meeting

By S. Michael Szczerbaty, M.A., MHSC 1



On December 7, 2015, Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (LACDMH) Adult System of Care (ASOC) Program Head, Scott Hanada, along with WOW coordinator, Isabel Mendez, hosted the Wellness Outreach Worker (WOW) end of year celebration by beginning with welcoming and introductions. The LACDMH Choir was on hand in this very festive atmosphere and led the WOW volunteers to sing along in a variety of

Christmas favorites like *Joy to the World*, *Feliz Navidad* and *Santa Baby*. ASOC's own Maria Amiliategui was on hand to lead the group as she sang these traditional songs, giving them extra emphasis.

The sixty WOW volunteers were pleased to hear the party's guest speaker, Dennis Murata, Acting Chief Deputy Director of LACDMH, say he wished he could triple and even quadruple their stipend awards each month for all the hard important work that WOW volunteers do. Dennis told everyone he has been involved with mental health care for 41 years, 31 of which has been with LACDMH.



Half the conference room walls were lined with gifts for the WOW volunteers. There were hundreds of gifts. Everyone had a chance of getting one or more of these many gifts through the raffle tickets they were given when they came to the celebration. Scott also raffled twenty-five, \$20-\$25 gift cards.

When it came time to eat, people commented on how great the lasagna and chicken parmesan tasted. Some WOW volunteers couldn't get enough and were coming back for seconds and even thirds until the food was gone. The food was definitely a big hit. But the raffles just kept coming as if Scott were determined to put a dent in the amount of gifts he had to raffle off between 2:00 pm and 5:00 pm.

Scott stated that in this fiscal year Adult System of Care trained fifty two new WOW volunteers. While the number trained was lower than in past years, ASOC was able to train many firsts – Veterans, Cambodians, and even CalWORKs WOW. WOW now represents almost all directly operated adult programs, as well as all cultures, ethnicities, religions, genders, and sexual orientations.



This year, WOW provided over 10,000 days of service within the directly operated programs. The SB 82 program was so impressed by the WOW program, that they created their own version of WOW. Scott went on to say that biggest accomplishment this year was the WOW program being recognized by the Mental Health Commission at its *Profiles of Hope Awards* dinner for the 2015 Outstanding Program. The award, Scott said, “really belongs to all of you for the outstanding work you do on a daily basis to make WOW the model for peer support programs.” There was a solid round of applause at hearing this from the WOW volunteers.

With regard to voter registration, Scott went on to say that WOW will soon encourage clients and support programs to register clients and family members to vote, as well as ensuring their voter registration information is current, so they can receive information on voting and ballots.

Finally, Scott told the audience that the overall roles and responsibilities of WOW will grow and expand in 2016. Additionally, the need for staff with lived experience will continue to grow, resulting in more opportunities for interested WOW to move into paid positions.





From left to right: Michael Szczerbaty, Scott Hanada, Isabel Mendez, Linda Stone-Abrams, Stephanie Maruska, Sarkis Tellalyan

